

Extreme Marine Leadership At Parris Island
By 1stLt Gerald F. Merna, USMC (Ret.)

There are approximately 140 living members of Easy Company, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines who served in Korea from 1950-1953. About 125 of them belong to the E-2-5 (Korea) Association. Several of these Marines saw extensive combat in World War II; all served in combat in Korea and many were awarded one or more Purple Heart Medals. E-2-5's *current* membership includes Duane Dewey, a recipient of the Medal of Honor and Arthur G. Barbosa, who was awarded the Navy Cross. Several others also earned significant awards, including Silver and Bronze Star Medals and Navy Commendation Medals.

From 15 – 19 September 2004, my wife and I were privileged to be with about 50 of my fellow Marine members and their ladies as we attended our annual Association reunion in Savannah, GA. The three highlights of our reunion were visits to Fort Pulaski on the 16th, Parris Island on the 17th, and on the 18th, held our traditional Memorial Tribute to E-2-5 Marines killed in Korea, followed by our Auction, and in the evening our Grand Banquet.

Many of us also went on a tour of the City of Savannah where, in two of the cities 24 “Squares” (parks) we saw their Vietnam War monument and a Marine Corps monument dedicated to Marines who have fallen in combat. General A. A. Vandegrift, the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1944 to 1947, (and the Commandant when I enlisted), who was born in Savannah, dedicated the Marine Corps monument on November 11th, 1947.



L: Savannah Vietnam Veterans Memorial, built in 1991, is a marble replica of Vietnam placed inside a reflecting pool. The names of Chatham County soldiers killed during the war are included in the memorial.
R: Marine Corps Memorial dedicated by Marine Corps Commandant Gen A.A. Vandegrift

The overwhelming highlight of our reunion was on September 17th when E-2-5 Marines were guests at both Morning Colors and the Recruit Graduation Parade at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, SC. It was at the end of the latter ceremony that I witnessed an extraordinary display of Marine Leadership that defies description; one unfortunately that only a handful of us were privileged to observe; thus my desire to share it with as many others as possible. A detailed explanation of this experience will follow.

Brigadier General Richard T. Tryon USMC is the Commanding General (CG) of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, SC. He also wears a “second hat” as Commander of the Eastern Recruiting Region. Colonel John Valentin, is the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Chief of Staff, and assists and shares the responsibilities inherent in the General’s two titles as well. At the morning Colors Ceremony Colonel Valentin had our group as his guests at Morning Colors.



BGen Richard T. Tryon
(Official Photo courtesy USMC)



Colonel John Valentin

This special occasion was well worth the effort we made to get up in the wee hours (probably earlier than the recruits did) and departing our hotel in Savannah to attend these ceremonies on time. I've never seen a Colors Ceremony done so beautifully and meaningfully in my 22+ years in the Corps (1947-1968).

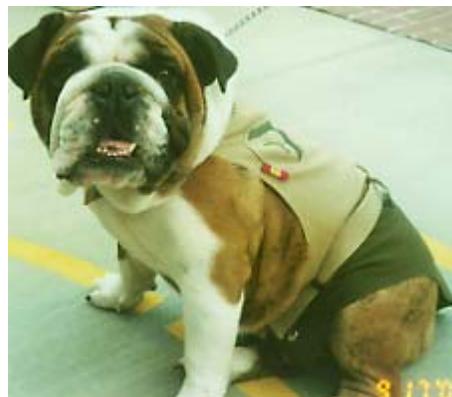
The performance of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) band, members of the Color Guard, the Depot Marines present, and even their Bulldog mascot, was just stirring.



Color Guard and Marine Marching Band, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S. C. at Morning Colors, 17 September 2004



Colonel John Valentin and Staff



MCRD Mascot



HqBn MCRD Staff

There's no doubt that having E-2-5's own Medal of Honor recipient, Duane Dewey and his wife Bertha at

this year's reunion contributed appreciably to our recognition as a unit. It is therefore only appropriate that a copy of Duane's Medal of Honor citation be included here:



*The President of the United States
in the name of The Congress
takes pleasure in presenting the*

Medal of Honor

to

DEWEY, DUANE E.

***Rank and organization:* Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Company E, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein.). *Place and date:* Near Panmunjon, Korea, 16 April 1952. *Entered service at:* Muskegon, Mich. *Born:* 16 November 1931, Grand Rapids, Mich.**

Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a gunner in a machinegun platoon of Company E, in action against enemy aggressor forces. When an enemy grenade landed close to his position while he and his assistant gunner were receiving medical attention for their wounds during a fierce night attack by numerically superior hostile forces, Cpl. Dewey, although suffering intense pain, immediately pulled the corpsman to the ground and, shouting a warning to the other marines around him, bravely smothered the deadly missile with his body, personally absorbing the full force of the explosion to save his comrades from possible injury or death. His indomitable courage, outstanding initiative, and valiant efforts in behalf of others in the face of almost certain death reflect the highest credit upon Cpl. Dewey and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



Cpl. Duane Dewey USMC 1952 and Today
(Photos courtesy of HomeOfHeroes.com)

Duane, accompanied by his wife Bertha, was personally recognized at morning colors ceremony, and Colonel Valentin also requested the E-2-5 Marines pose for a group picture in front of his HQ Building, where Duane was given the honor of holding the leash for the mascot.



Colonel Valentin & Duane Dewey, MOH



Bertha & Duane Dewey



Col. Valentin chats with Dewey's



E-2-5 (Korea) Association at 16Sep04 Reunion, MCRD PI SC



Angus Deming with Mascot

In the group photograph above, in the first row, Col. Valentin is on the left, Duane is 8th from the left, and the Sergeant Major is on the right. (I'm the Marine behind the mascot on Duane's right). Fifth from the left, front row wearing the blue shirt, is one of E-2-5's Corpsman, Robert S. "Doc" Shetler, not only a veteran of the Korean War, but also of the fighting on Iwo Jima.

The clear consensus of E-2-5 was that the outstanding event was the Recruit Graduation. Though it may well have been, several of us did not recall it being called a “graduation” during our time, but something as mundane as “finishing boot camp.” Many also recalled that in their time visitors were strongly “discouraged.”

Like several others, I was about to witness my first “Recruit Graduation” since I completed “boot camp.” I also learned today’s graduating platoons have “Year Books” similar to high school books, recording recruit training events with photographs of recruits and their D.I.’s. (I still have my treasured boot camp picture of Platoon 47, 1947 with the names of *my* fellow recruits and drill instructors at: <http://www.grunt.com/images-bs/jul04/merna.jpg> and http://www.myplatoon.5u.com/plt_47.htm).

But what a thrill it was witnessing these 500 new Marines earning that title and their Eagle, Globe and Anchor at the same time. I would estimate there were between one and two thousand visitors in attendance the day of our visit, consisting of family members and friends of the over 500 graduating recruits. Various introductions were made to the assembled guests, each accompanied by substantial applause.



E-2-5 Marines in Reviewing Stand

This applause was heartily repeated when our E-2-5 Company of Marines, most of us wearing our traditional red shirts and baseball caps (embroidered with our E-2-5 logo) were announced as being in attendance. We were proud when we were asked to stand to be acknowledged; the recognition and applause that followed was deeply appreciated by all of us. Note the umbrellas in the above picture. It started to drizzle at the very beginning of the parade, but almost as suddenly, the rain stopped, as if the parents and friends of the graduates silently but unanimously *ordered* it “not to rain on this parade;” almost as miraculously the sun came out bright and hot.

Eight platoons (six male, two female) of new Marines assembled at the rear of the parade field in preparation for “passing in review” behind the MCRD Band and Color Guard.



Eight Graduating Platoons of Marines muster at end of parade field as the Depot Band assembles

When the command was given eight massed platoons of fit, disciplined and smart Marines marched in platoon formation in front of the reviewing stand and assembled guests seated in the bleachers.



Drill Instructors (DI's) from each of the eight platoons also assembled and assumed their positions in front of their platoons, preparing to play their last role for the men and women they lived with, toiled for, instructed, counseled and cajoled until they had molded them into United States Marines.



Drill Instructors of 8 Graduating Platoons

Each of these DI's was appropriately and deservedly honored for their magnificent service. The "honor graduate" of each platoon (six men and two women), easily identifiable since they were the only ones wearing "undress blues" (at least I recall that's what that uniform of a khaki shirt with dress blue trousers was called when we wore it on recruiting duty), were given the honor of carrying their respective platoon's guidons.



DI's and Honor Graduates come "front and center" for recognition

Just prior to passing in review the Honor Graduates were also called "front and center" to be recognized and presented with plaques by both their own DI and the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of training at Parris Island. Each of the Honor Graduates was also wearing their new Private First Class (PFC) chevrons earned as part of their honors. (Noting this, it reminded me that to this day I never understood why *my* junior DI was "only" a Private, the same rank as his recruits)?

The excitement was building and I doubt there was anyone in attendance who could not help but both feel and share the presence of excitement as well as the same pride the recruits were experiencing as they reacted to the cheers of the assembled guests.



Eight "Honor Graduates" of (male) Platoons 2080, 2081, 2082, 2084, 2085, 2086 and (female) Platoons 4028 and 4029 receive plaques from their respective Drill Instructors

Though Col. Valentin and other senior Marine officers were present at this recruit graduation ceremony, the honor of being the "Reviewing Officer" was given to Sergeant Major Adam C. Terry. The parade officer announced that Sergeant Major Terry entered the Marine Corps in 1980 and listed the major assignments and events to date in his very distinguished career in a variety of key billets. I never witnessed that well-deserved and overdue honor of "reviewing officer" given to a Sergeant Major; that distinction almost always went to the senior officer present.



An LtCol. explains to families and guests the formidable training completed by the new Marines

The parade officer also gave a vivid and detailed description of the training each recruit completed in order to graduate, stressing particularly the rigors of the harsh and trying circumstances they both endured and successfully overcame during the "Crucible" portion of their training. This resulted in another very loud round of applause from the attendees.

With these "formalities" dispensed with, the order was given to the platoons standing at Parade Rest to "Pass In Review." With this, the official parade began as the new graduates "strutted" their stuff to continuous rounds of applause from the numerous guests. This is what their family and friends (and those of us from E-2-5as well) came to see, and none of us were disappointed.





The band began with a stirring musical medley by the Depot Marching Band, followed by the eight platoons and the Color Guard marching across the parade field and all passing in front of the reviewing stand and their families and friends seated in the bleachers as well. Following the six male platoons passing in review came the Depot Color Guard, and then the two platoons of Women Marines finished the March. (The Marine Corps is still the only military service training their recruits separately by gender).



Platoons 2080, 2081, 2082, 2084, 2085, 2086, all Male Marines



Depot Color Guard



Platoons 4028 and 4029, all Women Marines

At the end of the Pass in Review as the eight platoons were again assembled on the parade field facing the reviewing stand and bleachers, the command was given to “Dismiss Your Platoons.” The result can best be described by calling it “organized bedlam,” as over 500 new Marines broke ranks and immediately ran to their family and friends, who themselves were in “muddled disarray” as they streamed down from their seats to meet their Marines half way on the edge of the Parade Field.

It was at *this* juncture that I witnessed the remarkable display of leadership with which I began this story. That is, an example of command so unexpected and unusual that affected me instantly, and one that will remain with me for years to come.

When our bus arrived at the parade field bleachers after Morning Colors, we were escorted to a section of the bleachers that was reserved for E-2-5, to the immediate right of the official reviewing stand.

As luck would have it, I was seated in the second row from the bottom, closest to the official reviewing area. Upon sitting down I could not help but notice there were *nine* Marine privates, four female and five male, seated in the first row immediately in front of me. Simultaneously I noticed that immediately behind them, a half step below my feet, were neatly stacked rows of crutches. I thought that strange but did not dwell on it.



Nine Marine Privates in reviewing stands
(Writer is seated to right of lady in the blue jacket)

As seen in the above picture, the nine Privates were looking straight ahead, backs and bodies ramrod straight, unbent and unbowed. They could not have even seen us being seated as their eyeballs never moved left or right as they stared continuously straight ahead facing the parade field. I remember wondering several times what were these Marines doing here? Who were they? and what if anything was their function at this graduation? Were they here for “crowd control” at the conclusion of the Parade? To “police the area” (clean it up for any non-Marines) *after* the ceremony?

But looking repeatedly at the crutches neatly laid out below me, I also mused that perhaps they were “safeguarding” those crutches for handicapped visitors or guests seated on their right side and above them. As the ceremony wore on and I became caught up in the ceremonies like everyone else, I ceased wondering and guessing as I enjoyed the unfolding of the parade and ceremonies.

It was immediately upon the conclusion of the graduation that I learned *exactly* why these nine young Marines were sitting there so ramrod straight. When the platoon sergeants were given the order to “Dismiss Your Platoon,” the long-awaited command the recruits thought they’d never hear, the over 500 brand new Marines began running towards their loved ones in the reviewing stands. There were touching scenes of them hugging and kissing their loved ones as they were likewise being congratulated. It was during this literal “pandemonium” and excitement, with its accompanying noise and movement, with even our E-2-5 Marines climbing down from the rows of seats behind me to return to our busses, that I witnessed first hand the act of “Extreme Leadership” mentioned above.

Precisely in these few but “electric” minutes I noticed someone literally “dashing” out of the main reviewing stand on my left headed straight to where the nine Marine Privates and I were seated. And who was this individual racing towards them but none other than Colonel Valentin. Reenacting very closely what I witnessed and paraphrasing almost verbatim what I heard, this is what occurred at that moment.



As Colonel Valentin approached the nine Marine Privates he beckoned for them to gather around him. Immediately each one of them picked up a set of those neatly stacked crutches and formed a semi-circle around him. “So *that’s* whose those crutches belonged to” came my revelation.

Then, amidst the noise, excitement, confusion and general celebration where the 500 new Marines and their families and friends were now “hooked up” and were all over the place laughing and talking, Colonel Valentin put his arms around as many of the (now noticed by me) injured Marines as he could reach. As the Colonel moved among them he simultaneously made sure he touched each of them at least once, the scene looking much like a football coach embracing his team after a big win, and in words to this effect, said to them:

"Now Marines, don't feel badly that you were unable to march in your graduation parade today. That does not make you any less of a Marine, and your spirit and accomplishments were out there with your platoons. What you accomplished at Parris Island is not diminished one iota because you were injured at the end of your training and could not march. I want to congratulate each and every one of you for earning your Eagle, Globe and Anchor, for finishing recruit training honorably, and joining the ranks of the United States Marine Corps. Now go find your family and friends and enjoy the rest of this great day."

Colonel Valentin then shook hands with each of the nine after which he left as quickly as he arrived. At the same time, nine smiling, proud and obviously happy new Marines limped off with the help of their crutches to find their individual family members and friends, to share what they had just heard and experienced. Left standing amid others leaving all around him, was one emotional and smiling E-2-5 “old Corps” Marine with a lump in his throat, smiling, and totally affected by what he had just witnessed.

And what I had just personally witnessed was a *magnificent* and *extreme* exercise of leadership; using “extreme” because that’s how impressed I was with this Marine leader who, knowing the right thing to do, seized the moment to congratulate each of those young Marines. Marines who, though they *earned* the right to march in their platoon, one of those eight platoons with their fellow recruits, because of injuries were not able to do so. I doubt that, besides the injured Marines, and me there were five other people who heard or witnessed what Col. Valentin said and did to make them a part of that ceremony

and welcoming them into our Corps. I know *I* stood another foot taller! And I would be remiss if I did not pass this wonderful happening on to *all* Marines to let them know the good hands our Marines are in at Parris Island, SC, *and* elsewhere in our beloved Corps.

Later that day I had an opportunity to learn more about these “injured” Marines. At noon chow at the combined Officer/SNCO club I had the pleasure of being seated opposite the Drill Instructor who was assigned to our E-2-5 bus to escort us on a tour of the base. (We went to the grenade throwing range, several rifle ranges and obstacle courses, and over to the hand to hand combat area. We also visited the Marine Corps Museum and viewed its historic Marine Corps memorabilia, after which we shopped at the Marine Corps Base Exchange). I told our DI guide, who also had a Platoon of recruits to return to when we departed, what I observed Col. Valentin say to and do for those nine Marines, and while the DI was impressed, he was not surprised.

The DI told me that recruit injuries were not uncommon, and that many occurred during the “Crucible,” the culminating event of boot camp. Designed to test recruits to the limit both physically and mentally, it also drives home the core values of honor, courage, and commitment. As Marines know, this is where the emphasis is on trainee *teamwork under stress* with the Recruits getting eight hours of sleep during a 54 hour exercise, with little food that *they* are responsible for rationing out to themselves. They must endure a physically, mentally and emotionally challenging test, including marching about 40 miles in those 54 hours, before they *earn* their Marine emblems. And since most if not all of them did things they never thought they could do, most with the attitude “I am going to finish this,” and when they do, more often than not it was probably the most positive thing many of them had done or accomplished in their lives to date. This is borne out by the many letters to various publications from Marine Moms and Dads saying so.



Seven Marine recruits wear protective masks and must work as one to finish a Crucible warrior station. The climax of basic training, the Crucible, poses 54 hours of challenges and problems that Recruits can only solve by working as a team.

(Courtesy of Lance Cpl. Michael J. Supples)

(Except as otherwise credited, all photographs are provided courtesy of Gerald F. Merna)

So it is during the "Crucible" that many Marine recruits injure themselves as they fight on to finish it, with graduation only two weeks away. Because of this, they are not about to report any injuries lest they be sent back to begin their training anew. In fact, they often aggravate their injuries in the remaining two weeks trying to hide their initial injuries from their DI's and medical personnel.

Thus the reason why that dozen young Marine Privates were sitting in front of me on the parade field. They completed their training, they successfully finished the "Crucible," and they graduated, even if it was on crutches!

So I render a snappy hand salute to those 500 + who became Marines that day, their family and friends, as well as to those Marines who came before and after them, with or without crutches. And a very special place in my heart and memory is forever reserved for Colonel Valentin for his extraordinary act of command, and his unique conduct that best contributes to the inherent quality of character and temperament of Marine Corps spirit, leadership and courage.

Semper Fidelis,

**Gerald F. Merna
Mustang
MGySgt to 1stLt USMC (Ret.)
October 7, 2004**